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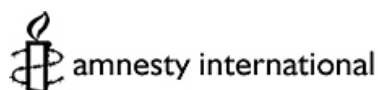
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Amnesty International Report 2010 - Bangladesh

PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH

Head of state: Zillur Rahman (replaced Iajuddin Ahmed in February)
Head of government: Sheikh Hasina (replaced Fakhruddin Ahmed in January)
Death penalty: retentionist
Population: 162.2 million
Life expectancy: 65.7 years
Under-5 mortality (m/f): 58/56 per 1,000
Adult literacy: 53.5 per cent

At least 74 people including civilians and army officers were killed during a Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) mutiny in February. After the mutiny, over 3,000 BDR personnel were detained, at least 48 of whom died in custody. Police and security forces were implicated in the alleged extrajudicial executions of up to 70 criminal suspects. At least 64 people were sentenced to death and at least three were executed. Women continued to be victims of acid attacks, rape, beatings and other attacks, with little preventive action from the authorities.

Background

The Awami League government took office in January, ending two years of an army-backed state of emergency under a civilian caretaker government. The new government endorsed some institutional reforms which the caretaker government had initiated under temporary legislation. These included the Human Rights Commission Act which Parliament enacted in July. The government also set up the Information Commission in July after Parliament passed the Right to Information Act in March.

Repression of dissent

Police continued to use unnecessary and excessive force against protesters.

- In September, dozens of police attacked peaceful protesters with batons in Dhaka at a rally organized by the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports. At least 20 protesters, including one of their leaders, Professor Anu Mohammed, were injured. Some 1,000 protesters were calling for greater transparency in the government's decision to award contracts to international oil companies. There was no independent investigation of the attack.

BDR rebellion – torture and fear of unfair trials

Members of the BDR launched a large-scale mutiny in February at the BDR headquarters in Dhaka. Mutineers killed at least 74 people, including six civilians, 57 army officers, one army soldier, nine *jawans* (lowest BDR rank), and one as yet unidentified person. Thousands of BDR personnel were subsequently confined to barracks and denied all outside contact. Reports soon

emerged that scores – possibly hundreds – of BDR personnel suffered human rights violations, including torture, for possible involvement in the mutiny. At least 20 BDR personnel died in custody between March and May alone. BDR officials claimed that four men committed suicide, and 16 died from natural causes. By 10 October, the total number of BDR personnel who died in custody was 48. There were allegations that torture may have been the cause or a contributing factor in some of these deaths. An official committee set up in May to investigate the deaths had not submitted its report by year's end.

An official investigation into the circumstances of the mutiny failed to establish its causes. Another investigation by the Criminal Investigation Department of the police to identify charges against more than 3,000 BDR personnel awaiting trial had not submitted its report by year's end. The government confirmed in September that trials for killings, hostage-taking and looting would take place in civilian courts. It was not clear what resources, particularly in terms of additional training for judges, were available to courts to provide fair trials to such an unprecedented number of defendants.

Indigenous Peoples' rights

The government began in August to disband major army camps in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) to meet one of several unimplemented agreements of the 1997 CHT peace accord. The accord, signed by the government and CHT representatives, recognized the rights of Indigenous Peoples living in the area and ended more than two decades of insurgency. The government took no action to resolve other unimplemented agreements, including a dispute over land ownership which Indigenous Peoples allege the army confiscated from them during the insurgency and gave to non-Indigenous Bangladeshis whom the government encouraged to settle there.

Extrajudicial executions

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina pledged in February and October that the government would end extrajudicial executions. However, up to 70 people reportedly died in "crossfire" in the first nine months of the year. Police authorities usually characterized suspected extrajudicial executions as deaths from "crossfire" or after a "shoot-out".

- Family members of Mohsin Sheikh, aged 23, and Mohammad Ali Jinnah, aged 22, two Awami League student leaders, alleged that Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) personnel shot the two men dead in Dhaka in May. The RAB claimed that the men disregarded a warning to stop at a checkpoint. It said that in the "gunfight" that followed, the men were shot dead. An autopsy of the bodies showed that none of the bullets fired by RAB officers had gone astray, which suggested that this was a planned killing and not a "gunfight". Police subsequently opened criminal investigations against 10 RAB personnel, but no one was brought to justice.

Violence against women

Newspapers reported at least 21 cases where a husband had killed his wife because her family could not afford to give him dowry money. Police sources said they had received at least 3,413 complaints of beating and other abuse of women over dowry disputes between January and October. In many of the known cases, prosecution led to conviction, but the authorities failed to develop, fund and implement an action programme to actively prevent violence against women. Women's rights groups said many cases of violence against women, such as the alleged rape of sex workers in police custody, were not reported for fear of reprisal and lack of protection.

- In October, Smrity Begum died after she was allegedly forced by her husband to swallow poison. He had demanded a motorbike from Smrity Begum's family as her dowry, which they could not afford. Police charged the husband with murder.

Legal, constitutional or institutional developments

The Minister of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs announced in August that a tribunal would be set up to hear cases of people accused of human rights abuses during the 1971 independence war, but no such tribunals were set up.

Death penalty

Five men found guilty of killing then President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975 had their death sentences upheld by the Supreme Court in November. At least 64 people were sentenced to death and at least three were executed.

Amnesty International visits/reports

- Amnesty International delegates visited Bangladesh in April and May.

- Looking for justice: Mutineers on trial in Bangladesh (ASA 13/006/2009)
- Bangladesh: Appeals for commutation of death sentences (ASA 13/007/2009)

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